

Colonial entanglements and cultic heterogeneity on Rome's Germanic frontier

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Abstract

Roman expansion into the Rhineland was followed by centuries of religious entanglements that involved the interactions of individuals and communities with a variety of backgrounds, interests and agendas, and, over time, an array of cultic narratives and practices was maintained, transformed and abandoned.. The notion of cultic heterogeneity used in this discussion is informed by the perception that all social constructs are reproduced through continuous affirmation vis-à-vis extant alternatives. Cultic discourse is inherently heterogeneous due to the discrepant attitudes, abilities and actions of situated agents. This will be explored by considering the symbolic narratives and ritual practices associated with the Hercules *Magusanus* cult on Rome's Germanic frontier.

Keywords: *cult, ritual, discourse, heterogeneity, Hercules, Roman, colonialism.*

Introduction

In the eighth century AD, the Dutch central river area formed a contested border zone between a Christianized South and pagan North. It was a time when faithful servants of the Christian God traversed hostile lands with the aim of converting the Frisian people (Talbot 1954; Heidinga 1999). Under the leadership of Willibrord, an Anglo-Saxon monk from Northumbria who would become known as the 'apostle to the Frisians', such efforts involved the destruction of pagan ritual spaces and the creation of Christian sites of worship. These incursions did not go uncontested of course, and, not infrequently, missionaries were killed and churches destroyed.

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Apart from harboring an understandable hesitance for abandoning long-held beliefs, the Frisians undoubtedly understood that the evangelizing missions into their territory were part of a wider effort by the Christian Franks to gain political dominance over the region. Such missionary work was done by one of Willibrord's disciples, an Irish Benedictine monk by the name of Werenfried, who would come to be associated with an 8th century church at present-day Elst. Its location offered a strategic point of access into Frisian territory. Upon his death, the monk was buried there, and the tomb of St. Werenfried would become a place of pilgrimage for those looking to relieve arthritic pains or improve horticultural efforts. In the role of patron saint, Werenfried would come to play an important part in the historical narratives produced by communities throughout the region.

This brief impression of Early Medieval religious entanglements reveals the interaction of individuals and communities with different identities and backgrounds, the politicization and contestation of religious narratives, rituals and spaces, as well as the involvement of personal convictions and public imaginaries. We can expect equally complex situations to have arisen in Roman times. Roman expansion into the Rhineland was followed by centuries of religious entanglements that involved the interactions of individuals and communities with a variety of backgrounds, interests and agendas, and, over time, a range of cultic discourses was produced, transformed and abandoned. My contribution to this collection of papers on the archaeology of ritual failure involves an exploration of the heterogeneity of symbolic narratives and ritual practices as this pertains to the Hercules *Magusanus* cult on Rome's Germanic frontier.

In this discussion, cult refers to a religious community whose members engage with a certain set of representational rituals, beliefs, objects and spaces for the fulfilment of spiritual and secular needs. Cults are socially reproduced and historically situated communities that operate within a larger system of shared moralities and worldviews. When enmeshed in political struggles, cults may be used for the explicit communication of dominant ideologies and the implicit reproduction of existing relations of power. At the same time, myriad opportunities arise for subordinate individuals and groups to reproduce, transform or abandon the form, content and meaning of these social constructs. Such dialectic interactions between dominant and subordinate discourses produce both diachronic change and synchronic variability, or, in other words, cultic heterogeneity. This notion of cultic heterogeneity is mainly informed then by the realization that any social discourse, whether understood as dominant or subordinate, is reproduced through continuous affirmation vis-à-vis real or imagined alternatives, and therefore always 'at risk' of being transformed by the structured improvisation of situated agents (Bourdieu 1977, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).³⁷ Such heterogeneity tends to frustrate the reductive tendencies of archaeologists seeking to understand social discourses, and the circumstances that gave rise to them. Our disciplinary interests and practices drive the search for patterns, and we are quick to normalize the

37 Claims of discursive homogeneity are commonly made in social discourses, but ignoring their actual heterogeneity risks channelling the political programs of our historical subjects.

observable and simplify the complex. Archaeological narratives are produced with a body of evidence that is as biased as our shifting interests, and the tendency to ignore or reduce past complexities has proven tenacious (Trouillot 1995, 19; Insoll 2004, 12; Johnson 2006, 123).

It so happens that Werenfried's church was built on the exact spot where a temple of Hercules *Magusanus* stood centuries before (Bogaers 1955; Derks 2002). The distribution of mostly archaeological and epigraphic evidence for his cult extends throughout the Lower Rhineland where an earliest association between a native *Magusanus* and Roman Hercules seems to have been made in the early first century AD (Derks 1991, 251). So far, three ritual sites have been associated with this deity, and all are located in the territory of the Batavians (Figure 21), an identity that arose during the tribal reshuffling of the Rhineland in the decades following Caesar's Gallic wars (58-50 BC). The *Magusanus* cult has been given an important role in shaping the ways this community forged a place for itself in the Roman Empire (Roymans 2004). Its sanctuaries are assumed to have been sites where communal feasts were staged to commemorate communal origins, where elites competed for social standing, and where men engaged in martial rites-of-passage and personal votive rituals (Derks 1998, 98; Roymans 2009, 232).³⁸

Recent research on Hercules *Magusanus* (Derks 1998; Roymans 2009) has been characteristically Marxist-structuralist in outlook, such that it emphasizes the importance of enduring value-systems grounded in economic modes of existence. From this perspective, archaeological distributions of cult practice have been associated with more-or-less distinct landscapes³⁹, whereby the appeal of Hercules in the lowlands of the Roman-Germanic frontier zone is explained by themes commonly associated with this particular deity — martiality, masculine prowess, pastoral lifeways and adventurous exploration. Hercules seems to have been ideally suited to serve as the patron of native soldiers and pastoralists, and as mediator between Roman civilization and Germanic barbarity (Roymans 2009, 233).

Foundation myths are also viewed as important elements in the construction of imagined histories that served to define the collective identities and self-image of local groups. A '*mythological anchoring of Celto-Germanic groups in the Roman world*' occurred through a syncretic process whereby local deities were identified

38 Archaeological investigation in the Batavian homeland paints a picture of a society largely dominated by the military sphere, whereby the role of pre-Roman martial and pastoral ideologies, and the 'suitability' of the Batavian community for Roman military recruitment, has featured importantly (Roymans 2004).

39 Derks (1998), for example, observes that the distribution of syncretic Mars dedications is primarily restricted to a southern agricultural zone while those to Hercules *Magusanus* are mainly found across the pastoral lowlands of the northern river and coastal areas.

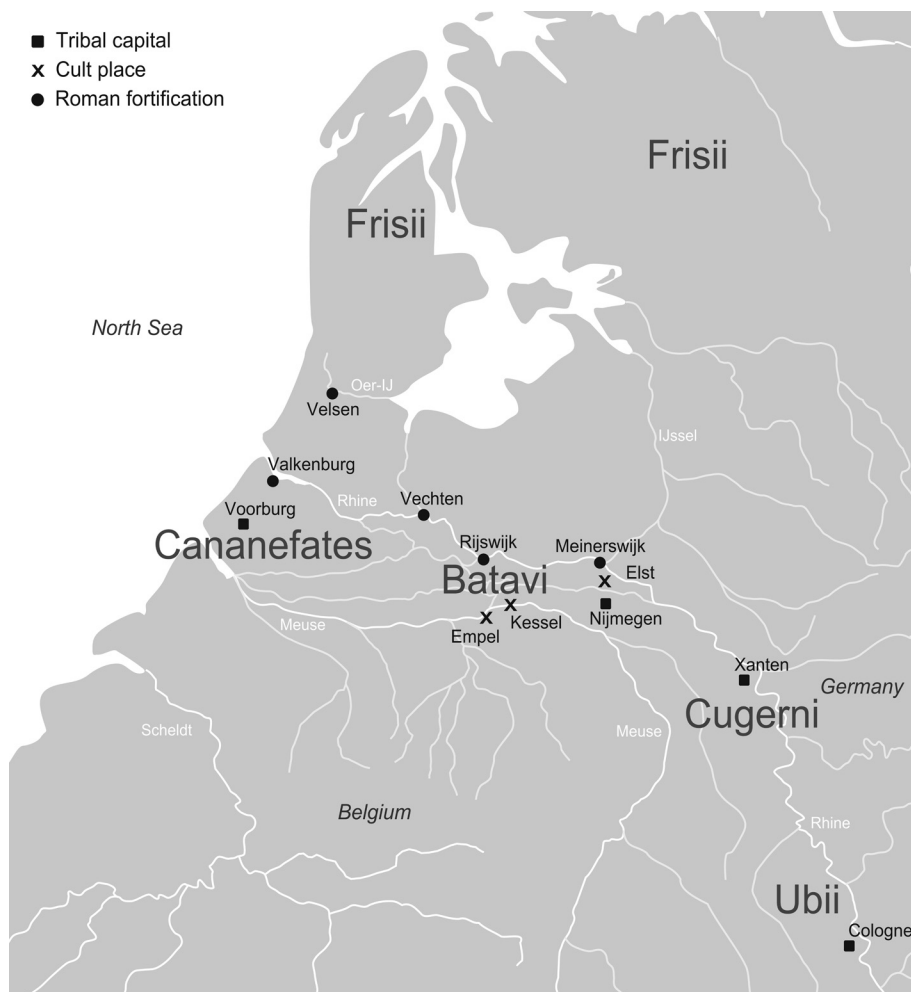


Figure 21. Paleogeographic reconstruction of the Netherlands in the first century AD, with sites and tribal groups mentioned in the text.

with those from the Greco-Roman pantheon (Roymans 2009, 235).⁴⁰ While an association with Rome's foundation myth has not been considered in the case of *Magusanus*, the Batavians may well have claimed descent from Hercules himself (Derks 1998, 111). It is furthermore held that descent myths were not imposed by Rome, but were willingly and actively appropriated by local aristocrats who were in the best position to learn about Greco-Roman mythology (Roymans 2009, 225).

40 The use of syncretism here differs little from mid 20th century anthropological formulations. Herskovits, for example, argues how syncretism occurs at times of cultural interaction and results from 'the tendency to identify those elements in the new culture with similar elements in the old one, enabling the persons experiencing the contact to move from one to the other, and back again, with psychological ease' (Herskovits 1966, 57; see Apter 2004 for a discussion). Roman archaeologists have come to embrace the concept ever since nativists have urged for a reassessment of the widely used *interpretatio Romana* concept (the recognition of divine responsibility and capability in local deities by Roman outsiders) which ignores indigenous perceptions.

In other words, native elites are treated as the primary promoters of the dominant discourse, and the community-wide adoption of new narratives and rituals.⁴¹

The post-colonial perspectives that influenced Roman archaeology during the 1980s and 1990s have shaped interpretations in the Lower Rhineland as well (Brandt and Slofstra 1983; Blagg and Millett 1990; Millett 1990; Derks 1991; Roymans 1995). Archaeologists working from a nativist point-of-view typically underscore Roman laissez-fair attitudes while emphasizing the role of native elites in acculturation processes. In the Lower Rhineland specifically, a distinction tends to be made between non-intervention in ideological and economic domains on the one hand and political and military imposition on the other (Derks 1999, 355). Despite this added nuance, elites and native soldiers continue to draw scholarly attention for their perceived centrality in Romano-Batavian relations and the production of ethnic discourse. While this centrality of elites in local transformation processes in the region is problematic due to their near absence in the archaeological record (Van Driel-Murray 2002, 200), a restrictive focus on the assertive role of particular social groups (*e.g.* military men) remains problematic from a theoretical point-of-view as well (Mata 2012, 36). By placing the responsibility of syncretic identifications squarely in the hands of assertive local elites, nativists have downplayed the interests of colonial authorities and neglected the heterogeneity of social constructs.

In considering the contributions of indigenous populations to colonial entanglements, post-colonial archaeologists have argued that the arrival of ‘colonial’ materials in local contexts cannot simply be explained in terms of the adoption of associated values and behaviours (Mattingly 1997; Webster 1997). In other words, the presence of ‘Roman’ materials and practices cannot speak to their social role in local contexts in any clear-cut way. While this is a crucial point, it is also true that local transformations occurred under imposed conditions, and, especially in a military frontier zone, must be examined with Roman politico-military strategies and ideological discourses in mind. At the same time, colonial authorities and their agents are rarely able to ensure the acceptance of dominant discourses by social subordinates, even under conditions of extreme imposition. This complexity has been recognized by those archaeologists who treat colonial encounters as intricate entanglements of embedded interests and strategies pursued by a wide variety of individuals and groups (Van Dommelen 2002; Stein 2005; Dietler 2010).

Under colonial conditions, cultic, ethnic and other social discourses are reproduced in heterogeneous ways due to the understandings, capacities and actions of local agents with different socio-cultural backgrounds and dispositions (Shennan 1989; Jones 1997). Those with the highest archaeological and historical

41 An ‘ideological core’ is thought to have persisted after a formative period of Batavian ethnogenesis despite the social and economic transformations that followed (Derks 2009, 268). Such continuity is argued for because large-scale settlement of foreign veterans never seem to have taken place in the region where the only sanctuaries of Hercules *Magusanus* were located, while the monumentalization of the sanctuaries around 100 AD is taken as a testament to their continued importance for the Batavian community. In contrast, the foundation of Roman colonies, the influx of foreigners, and the establishment of a public Mars cult in the German Rhineland are thought to have caused the marginalization of Hercules there (Roymans 2009, 230).

visibility are colonial authorities, local elites, and the artists and intellectuals they employ. This visibility results from the successful imposition and normalization of their authority and their dominance over political, military and religious institutions. However, their constructs are always open to wider interpretation and appropriation because these are cultivated in the public domain (Streets 2004, 145). Subalterns ignore, adopt, or transform dominant discourses for their own benefit, with their content interpreted and appropriated in accordance with local logics. Such dynamics allow for their survival beyond the formative circumstances under which they were forged, while simultaneously assisting the production of alternatives. In response to such challenges, dominant discourses are continuously reformulated in order to remain politically effective. It is through such dialectics that we may expect symbolic narratives and ritual practices to persist, fail or transform.

Herculean Multivalence

Multivalence was an inherent aspect of Roman religion. This is clearly shown by the wide variety of participants in any single cult, but also in the way symbolic narratives and ritual practices had no real constancy; as situational constructs, they were ever-adjusted to local and historical circumstances. Hercules was continuously appropriated and reinvented, with discourses becoming increasingly politicized due to the power struggles and imperialist endeavors of the Late Republic period (Galensky 1972; Ritter 1995).⁴² Different thematic associations were made by a wide variety of groups and individuals. For Romans, Hercules for a long time had primarily been a protector of commercial activities. It seems the divine hero who epitomized the search for rewards from perilous labor was easily associated with the uncertainties inherent in commerce and travel, and his sanctuaries are commonly found along trade and transhumance routes, and near emporia, markets and fairs (Bowden and Rawlings 2005). Cultic rituals involved merchants dedicating a portion of their profits (*decuma*) to Hercules, to ensure his protection.

As Rome's military enterprises expanded during the Republican period, Hercules increasingly became associated with the martial sphere, such that the cults of Hercules *Invictus* (Unconquered Hercules) and Hercules *Victor* (Hercules the Conqueror), both located in the *forum Boarium*, rose to prominence. As Rome's most ancient forum, this sacred space increasingly witnessed the organization of public triumphs and lavish banquets (*epulum*) staged by prominent Roman leaders who competed for prestige and popular support (Plutarch *Crassus* 12.2; Kondoleon

42 The thematic repertoire found throughout the Western Mediterranean is highly varied. Hercules was associated with a broad range of themes, including health, springs, youth, strength, immortality, commerce, cattle-breeding, travel, even eloquence (Bowden and Rawlings 2005). Furthermore, syncretic constructs of the Classical Hercules and local divinities can be found throughout the Italic peninsula (Marzano 2009, 83), with references made to a wide variety of elements drawn from Herculean myth. For example, traders in olive oil could refer to the mythical fact of Hercules *Olivarius* importing the olive plant from Hyperborea (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 5.7.7), and similar notions will have been entertained by salt traders (Hercules *Salarius*), quarrymen (Hercules *Saxanus*) or boxers (Hercules *Pugilis*).

and Bergman 1999; Beard 2007).⁴³ Such events could involve triumphant Roman generals dedicating a portion of the spoils of war to Hercules (Marzano 2009, 86).

This growing emphasis on the martial characteristics of Hercules involved the appropriation of Herculean myth by the heroes and foes of Late Republican imperialism (Ritter 1995, 56).⁴⁴ Literary and numismatic sources frequently link Hercules to individuals such as Hannibal, Caesar, Antonius, and Octavian, and it is clear that the divine hero featured importantly in the personal lives of prominent political figures (Cassius Dio *Roman History* 37.52). An important aspect of this development is the manner in which these individuals became personally involved with local communities; like Hercules before them, Roman leaders founded new communities, and, not infrequently, inserted themselves into local lineages.⁴⁵ The benevolence of Hercules was publicly vied over then, and, in terms of ritual, could involve *evocatio* ceremonies that served to call away his protection over the enemy (Millett 1995, 99; Marzano 2009, 88).

The imperial domination over religious affairs during the Augustan age was the culmination of this Late Republican trend whereby public discourses and institutions became increasingly politicized by private individuals. Under Augustus (63 BC-19 AD), new narratives were produced through poetry and iconography in order to position the emperor as the divinely-sanctioned founder of a new age of peace and prosperity achieved through his Herculean efforts (Dobbin 1995).

43 The political importance of such events becomes clear when we consider the legislative restrictions placed on public banqueting by politicians who sought to monopolize the *epulum* (Marzano 2009, 85). Writers at the time understood their political significance (Plutarch *Aemilius Paulus* 28.5), as did Augustus, who restricted their occurrence to celebrations of the emperor and his family, thereby situating himself as the ultimate benefactor of Rome.

44 Hannibal portrayed himself as Hercules and was following in the divine hero's footsteps when crossing the Alps (Rawlings 2005). We also find him dedicating spoils of war in Gaditanus (Cadiz in southern Spain), at a prominent Hercules sanctuary (Livy *History of Rome* 21.21.9; Mierse 2004). The idea of Hercules returning from Spain and having prepared barbarian lands for conquest occurs in association with later figures such as Pompey, Caesar and Augustus. Claims to direct descent from Hercules were also made, by Antonius, for example, which affected how he presented himself to his followers and probably helped promote his long-held popularity among the legions (Plutarch *Antonius* 4.1; Spencer 2001, 262). Also interesting is that Caesar (like his conquering predecessor Alexander the Great) seems to have suffered from the 'sacred disease' (possibly epilepsy), also known as the 'madness of Hercules' (*heraklei nosos, morbus herculeus*). Such identifications may have led Caesar as a young boy to write a poem in honor of Hercules (*Laudes Herculis*, Praises of Hercules). The personal interests and involvement of these important individuals in shaping imperialist discourses and public imaginaries should not be underestimated.

45 New communities arose around military sites and wherever military veterans were settled, but, also more drastically, whenever conquered groups were uprooted and placed in new territories such as was common along the Germanic frontier. Plutarch suggested that it was Rome's destiny to spread noble blood through the world, a fate fulfilled by Antonius and Caesar in good Herculean fashion (Plutarch *Antonius* 36.4). Undoubtedly, this resulted in many politically motivated claims of descent within local communities (Tacitus *The Histories* 4.55).

Hercules came to occupy a central place in Rome's mythical history with the *forum Boarium* becoming the epicenter of Rome's mythical past (Barry 2011, 15).⁴⁶

The militarization and masculinization of Roman society also produced sociopolitical constructs of gender distinction that emphasized male politico-military engagement and female exclusion from the public sphere (Spencer 2001, 261). While women generally seem to have been barred from attending military celebrations in the *forum Boarium*, they were not universally excluded from the Hercules cult (Holleman 1977, Schultz 2000). Not only do female characters feature strongly in Herculean myth, he seems to have played an important role in the lives of Roman women as well.⁴⁷ Interesting in terms of political narrative is the role of female oracles and muses. Literary sources refer to prophetesses based in sanctuaries dedicated to Hercules⁴⁸, while the Roman cult of the muses centered on the temple of Hercules *Musagetes* (*aedes Herculis Musarum*) in Rome. It was this temple Augustus chose to rededicate in an atmosphere of political reconciliation after the battle at Actium, where his triumph over Antonius and Cleopatra made him the sole ruler of Rome. In this way, Hercules, the deified hero most often associated with male virility, adventure and conquest, was simultaneously linked, in equally gendered terms, to themes of culture, concord, and arbitration (Hardie 2007).

Hercules on the Germanic frontier

The evidence for the syncretic Hercules *Magusanus* comes primarily from votive inscriptions found throughout the Rhineland and the materials excavated at three ritual sites in the Batavian territory. Excavations at Elst, Empel and Kessel (Figure 21) have provided information about the contexts, materials and practices associated with his cult. All three sites show evidence for pre-Roman activity, a fact that has been used to argue for the existence of a local deity that came to be identified with the Roman Hercules.⁴⁹ The sanctuaries at Empel and Elst can be

46 In the *forum Boarium*, no fewer than six sites were dedicated to the worship of Hercules (Spencer 2001, 265). This was the location where Hercules arrived with Geryon's cattle which the brute Cacus attempted to steal (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 1.39). Vergil attributes the foundation of the *ara maxima* to Hercules himself, and predates it to the arrival of Aeneas in Latium (Vergil *Aeneid* 7-8).

47 In Rome, Hercules was traditionally viewed as the guardian of wedded life and women tied their wedding dress (*tunica recta*) with the 'knot of Hercules', which symbolized protection, fertility and love.

48 A reference to rituals of divination is made by Pausanias in his description of Hercules *Buraicus* (*Description of Greece* 7.25.10). Caesar purportedly consulted a prophetess at the temple of Hercules *Gaditanus* in Spain (Seutonius *Caesar* 7), while Augustus conferred with the Tiburtine sibyl whose sanctuary in Tivoli is associated with a temple dedicated to Hercules *Saxanus*. There, an association (*collegium*) known as the *Herculanei Augustales* engaged in a cult of the divine emperor (Bourne 1916, 64).

49 This makes *Magusanus* the only occurrence of an indigenous Hercules north of the Alps (Roymans 2004, 242). Since Hercules syncretisms were common throughout the Italic peninsula, it is worth considering how Hercules *Magusanus* might be associated with the arrival of Italic groups in the Lower Rhineland. A similar process may be behind the presence of the great number of *matronae* dedications in the region (Derks 1991, 245; Garman 2008).

linked to Hercules directly⁵⁰, while all three sites have provided materials primarily associated with martiality, votive rituals, and commensal practices (Roymans and Derks 1994; Derks 1998; Roymans 2009).

Pre-Roman depositions at Elst, Empel and Kessel cannot be dated earlier than the first century BC. Because of this, the rise of these ritual sites can perhaps best be interpreted in light of Roman state expansion and subsequent Celto-Germanic tribalization and militarization (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992; Millett 1995, 99). One can think here of the increased participation of Rhineland communities in political and military conflicts across Gallia and Germania. In this context, new cultic practices were not simply the latest manifestations of pre-existing 'cultural mentalities' but resulted from the formation of new group identities and the widespread militarization of Celto-Germanic communities.⁵¹ As noted above, the Hercules cult at Rome became increasingly linked to triumphal celebrations that involved the sacrifice of spoils of war. That such practices were not uniquely Roman is shown by war booty depositions found throughout northern Europe that resulted from similar commemorative rituals (Grane 2007). The pre-Roman depositions in the Lower Rhineland are perhaps best understood in such terms as well.⁵²

Against a background of military conquest and territorial consolidation we can expect Roman authorities to have been acutely interested in the formation of symbolic landscapes. Roman political and ideological interests will have driven the colonization of existing sites of symbolic importance and the active construction of sacred landscapes on the edge of Empire. A crucial aspect of the *Magusanus* sanctuaries is their strategic distribution in a riverine frontier landscape. The sanctuary at Empel was located on the southern bank of the Meuse on one of the highest levees in the area, near the mouth of the Dieze River (Roymans and Derks 1994). The sanctuary at Kessel was located c. 10 km east of Empel near the confluence of the rivers Meuse and Waal, reportedly a site of strategic importance

50 At Empel, a votive inscription to *Magusanus* was found dated to the Trajanic period and left by a veteran of the *Legio X*. The remains of a statuette of Hercules (Hercules *Bibax*, 'the drinker') were also found there and it resembles one discovered at *castellum Flevum* (Velsen), a fort built north of the Rhine during Early Roman military offensives (Swinkels 1994, 85). At Elst, an altar dedicated to Hercules was found, as well as the remains of a Hercules statuette (Roymans 2004, 242; Derks *et al.* 2008, 138).

51 Coin distribution analysis has shown how the earliest coins in the Lower Rhineland arrived in the mid second century BC, increase significantly in number at the time of Caesar's wars, peak during the period of Augustan campaigns, and decline thereafter. Similar distributional fluctuations have been noted for the ritual depositions of weapons and military gear (Roymans and Aarts 2005). Such patterns reflect the ebb and flow of political interactions and violent conflict across the Celto-Germanic world and not merely the continuation of pre-Roman warrior ideologies.

52 The Late Iron Age materials found at Kessel and Empel (Roymans 2004) could certainly also have resulted from a single military event. Such a battle-ground thesis is made likely by literary references to Caesar's defeat of Germanic groups (Usipetes and Tencteri) in the vicinity (Caesar *Gallic War* 4.4-15). The presence of human bones and domestic materials can be explained by the reported fact that these groups consisted of men, women and children intent on settling new territory, while the wide range of Late La Tène weapon types encountered there may be explained by the fact that Celto-Germanic warriors were not uniformly equipped, carrying weapons of variable origin and age. Whether the evidence resulted from a single battle or recurring rituals associated with a martial cult, these would have been sites of symbolic significance.

for the Romans (Roymans 2004, 131). The Elst sanctuary was located between, and at a short distance from, the Batavian capital (Nijmegen) and the Rhine frontier. The nearest frontier post was *castra Herculis* (Meinerswijk), a legionary fort positioned to guard a connecting waterway between the Rhine and the northerly flowing IJssel.⁵³

Monumentalization of the three sanctuaries was likely the result of Roman initiatives.⁵⁴ Roman interests for constructing a symbolic frontier resulted in the construction of one of the largest known Gallo-Roman temples at Elst, a monumental structure worthy of renovation before being permanently abandoned around 170 AD. Roman interests will likewise have ensured that the Empel sanctuary recovered from a destructive fire that occurred *c.* 200 AD, and for the site to have remained in use until the first half of the third century. It is not clear when the sanctuary at Kessel was abandoned, but fortifications from the second half of the fourth century (built in part from materials recovered from an earlier temple structure) testify to the continued importance of that location to Roman interests. Not surprisingly then, evidence suggests that these symbolic sites were contested spaces, with signs of destruction at Elst dated to the Batavian revolt of 69 AD, and literary and numismatic references pointing at important military events near Empel and Kessel.⁵⁵ Their association with Roman imperial power is likely the main reason why these sanctuaries were commonly targeted by Germanic groups whose incursions increased over the course of the late second and early third century.

At a time of recurring Roman expeditions into Germania the sanctuaries will have been used for regular calendar events faithfully observed by military communities, as well as for staging the occasional triumph. Such events involved processions of military men in parade armor carrying banqueting implements and the sacrificial spoils of war. Sacrificial ceremonies were followed by communal feasts that allowed soldiers to share in the achievements of their military leaders, and be reminded of the power and glory of Rome and her divinely-sanctioned

53 This fort was likely built during the offensive campaigns of Germanicus (14-16 AD), a popular Roman general and nephew to Emperor Tiberius. Its importance to Rome is also shown by the fact that the fort was rebuilt several times up until the fourth century (Ammianus Marcellinus *Rerum Gestarum* 18.2.4). This interest for sites of strategic importance is also shown by the location of *castellum Fectio* (Vechten) on a northerly branch of the Rhine that allowed access north to the river Oer-IJ where *castellum Flevum* (Velsen) was located.

54 Not only is there evidence for the involvement of the Roman military (Van Enckevort 2005; Van Enckevort and Thijssen 2005), but the late date of monumentalization also speaks against it having resulted from native initiative. This occurred long after martiality as an ideological focus of tribal warriors became mundane due to the regularization of military service, a trend suggested by the decline in coin and *militaria* depositions at the sanctuaries, and their increased presence in settlement contexts (Nicolay 2007). Furthermore, it remains to be adequately explained why the sanctuaries of female deities, which significantly outnumber those of male deities in the Rhineland, did not experience such monumentalization (Derks 1998, 122); if such efforts involved the initiatives of Romanized elites, why this neglect of the founding mothers of native communities?

55 Caesar defeated Germanic armies near Kessel where the rebel Julius Civilis would later battle his nephew Julius Briganticus during the Batavian uprising of 69 AD (Roymans 2004, 144). Of further interest are the coin emissions of the Gallic Emperor Postumus (259-268 AD) which reference Hercules *Magusanus/Deusonius* (Hercules of the Dieze River). Postumus may have been referencing important battles fought against invading Franks near Empel.

emperor (Marzano 2009, 91). We have seen how such events became associated with the Hercules cult in the *forum Boarium*, and this will likely have been the case for the sanctuaries in the Lower Rhineland as well.⁵⁶

There is little doubt that Caesar's conquest of Gallia inspired the actions of those who came after, while Early Imperial military adventures into the unknown regions of the North shaped public narratives for generations. New communities and landscapes were formed during a period of repeated military operations beyond the Germanic frontier, and, in the public imagination, the deeds of great men paralleled Herculean labors.⁵⁷ Literary sources show how links were being made between Hercules and Rome's subduers of Germanic barbarity, and such associations can also be found articulated in the symbolic landscapes that were being formed throughout the Rhineland.⁵⁸ We can expect narratives of conquest and nation-building to have taken shape in the early Roman period, feeding the public imagination and political discourses for some time.

Religious cults and their sanctuaries will have been sites of intense politicization, symbolic battle grounds for the hearts and minds of colonizer and colonized alike. While the *Magusanus* cult may have served the legitimization of the Batavian ethnic identity (Roymans 2004, 249), the fact that it had come about due to Roman imposition will have been at once inescapable and contested. Narratives of

56 The ceramic assemblage includes high numbers of drinking wares, along with oil *amphorae* and *mortaria* (Klomp 1994). The range of metal objects includes coins, brooches, weapons, armor and horse gear (Roymans 2004). At Empel, the remains of a wagon stand out along with the metal fittings that may have embellished it (Roymans and Derks 1994); these include the military dress boot of a general or emperor possibly pointing at triumphal celebrations, and a small head of the Titan goddess Luna whose symbolic repertoire includes themes of rebirth and eternal youth. Her presence in the context of triumphal celebration may also have symbolized the conquest of Greco-Roman Gods over the Titans (*i.e.* civilization over barbarity), or her role as caretaker of the Nemean Lion killed by Hercules. Comparable Luna figures were found in Nijmegen near the camp of *Legio X* (Swinkels 1994, 89). The bronze statuette of Hercules *Bibax* ('the drinker') may also be understood as referencing triumphal banqueting or immortality (Swinkels 1994).

57 Caesar was the first Roman general to venture across the Rhine into Germanic territory, where his personal ambitions resulted in the brutal annihilation and displacement of local groups. Agrippa, serving Augustus as governor of Gaul (39-38 BC), conducted further operations across the Rhine and settled the Ubii on the west bank near Cologne. Agrippa also likely was the one who settled the Batavi, a splinter group of the trans-Rhenian Chatti, in the Dutch river area. After the defeat of Lollius by Germanic groups in 16 BC, Drusus (stepson to Augustus and brother to Tiberius) arrived in the Rhineland and to him we may ascribe the military reorganization of the Upper and Lower Rhineland. He ordered the construction of roads and canals, established army bases at Nijmegen, Xanten and Cologne, and campaigned across the Rhine between 12-9 BC. His brother, the future emperor Tiberius, settled the Cugerni on the west bank near Xanten and he campaigned extensively across the Rhine from 9 BC-12 AD. Next, Germanicus (son of Drusus) campaigned across the Rhine (14-16 AD), and it is certain that he made use of Batavian troops.

58 A good example of the motivation behind such monumental landscapes is the Tiberius column from the Batavian capital (Nijmegen) which has been linked to triumphal events staged in 17 AD in honor of Germanicus, and can perhaps best be understood as a symbolic celebration of the triumph of Roman civilization over barbarity (Panhuysen 2002). The Trophy of Augustus in the sanctuary of Heracles *Monoikos*, located along the Via Julia that connected Gaul with the Italic peninsula, communicates a comparable message (see www.monuments-nationaux.fr). It celebrates the subjugation of Alpine tribes by Augustus, through the achievements of Drusus and Tiberius. Cassius Dio mentions how Augustus frequently received the appellation of emperor thanks to the victories of Drusus and Tiberius (Cassius Dio *Roman History* 54.33).

contestation will have dominated discourses during times of violent conflict between Rome and trans-Rhenian communities. Reportedly, Hercules was one of the main divinities of interest among Germanic groups (Tacitus *Germania* 3.1), such that we can expect *ovatio* rites, for securing the protection of Hercules and calling him away from the Germanic side, to have taken place at the sanctuaries.⁵⁹ The struggles for his benevolence, between Romans and their Batavian allies, and between Romans and their Germanic foes, will have been an important part of the discourse that surrounded *Magusanus*.

We have no direct evidence for the existence of an emperor cult being associated with Hercules *Magusanus*. Epigraphic evidence from the German Rhineland shows how individuals active in the priesthoods of syncretic Mars cults were also active in the imperial cult (Derks 1991, 252), but such evidence has so far not been found for Hercules. However, that links between his cult and imperial rulers were made certainly seems possible when we consider the unique relationship between the Julio-Claudian dynasty and the native soldiers who loyally served their Roman patrons for generations (Speidel 1994; Roymans 2004). It would not have been forgotten that these communities owed their very existence, and continued good fortune, to their colonial masters. The *Magusanus* cult will have provided ways for individuals and communities to place this special relationship in sacred terms, and perform rites to ensure its survival.

Equally significant is the fact that, over the course of decades, many individuals had received honorable ‘membership’ in the Julio-Claudian house. It seems wholly possible, therefore, that these new members of Rome’s ruling clans came to consider themselves heirs of empire.⁶⁰ Hercules comes into play here because he was perceived as the initial civilizer of the North. Of course, imperial discourses such as these served to legitimize Roman conquest of Gallic and Germanic barbarity, but the appropriation of Roman foundation myths also made it possible for local communities to make similar claims of inheritance. Such claims, expressed through cultic discourse, can be understood as the ultimate exploitation of imposed conditions by the colonized.⁶¹

59 A ritual likely performed on the Germanic side as well (Tacitus, *The Annals* 2-12).

60 Such attitudes are perhaps reflected in the bold claims of individuals such as Julius Sabinus of the Gallic Lingones tribe who instigated his own rebellion during the period of the Batavian revolt. He claimed high birth through blood-descent from Caesar himself — Sabinus’ great-grandmother apparently could be added to the Roman general’s list of conquests (Tacitus *The Histories* 4.55). British pre-conquest rulers actually presented themselves as Hercules (Roymans 2004, 244), and, in doing so, were probably communicating political claims in symbolic terms understood by an adversary bent on conquest.

61 This is furthermore suggested by the circumstances that surround the Batavian Revolt of 69 AD. The end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty followed the death of Emperor Nero (37-68 AD), an event in which the Batavian guard played a crucial role. The Germanic provinces feature importantly in the ensuing period of political strife. Of particular interest is the fact that the Rhineland troops who refused to support Emperor Galba (68-69 AD), declared their commander Vitellius (69 AD) ‘emperor of the Germanic provinces’ by handing him the sacred sword of Caesar (Suetonius *Vitellius* 8). Such initiatives not only reflect a desire to establish new bonds with the next emperor in terms of the old alliance with the Julio-Claudians, but also local feelings of responsibility and entitlement. Batavians, Ubians and other communities in the Rhineland must have considered themselves important players in the political struggles of the Empire. When Vespasianus (69-79 AD) came to power by successfully ending all opposition, no members of the imperial horse guard were recruited in the Rhineland for the next three decades.

But what happened when expansion into Germania came to a halt and Rome instead focused on territorial consolidation and the construction of a permanent frontier system along the Rhine? As Roman rulers opted for defensive policies, discourses in the Rhineland will have adjusted to fit new realities. The Early Roman narratives that centered on military success and the deeds of conquering generals were gradually adjusted to emphasize themes of immortality and prosperity such as we find them in a wide variety of representations from the second and third century AD (Speidel 1994; Derks 1998; Garman 2008). The multivalence of Hercules allowed for the continued relevance of his cult on the frontier, with ‘Hercules the conqueror’ of barbarity gradually becoming ‘Hercules the protector’ of a prosperous and eternal Roman Empire.

Despite changes in imperial policies, interest for Hercules did not waiver, and, as a result of the concerns of individual Roman rulers, could even flourish (Hekster 2005). Some examples may illustrate how this manifested itself in the Lower Rhineland. Few Roman legions are known to have claimed Hercules as patron deity, and it seems telling that two of those (*Legio XXII Primigenia* and *Legio XV Primigenia*) were founded for service along the Germanic frontier (Keppie 2000)⁶². Equally suggestive is the fact that another legion of Hercules (*Legio Traianus Fortis*) was founded by Emperor Trajan (98-117 AD) who, before ascending to the imperial throne, served as governor of Lower Germany (*Germania Inferior*) where he oversaw substantial construction efforts (Hessing 1999).⁶³ Once emperor, he reinstated the Batavian horse guard to serve as his personal bodyguard and elevated the administrative status of two tribal capitals in the province — *Colonia Ulpia Traiana* (Xanten) and *Ulpia Noviomagus Batavorum* (Nijmegen). Importantly, the monumentalization of the *Magusanus* sanctuaries can be dated to Trajan’s reign. His successor Hadrian (117-138 AD), who like Trajan was of Spanish descent, had served as an officer in one of the legions of Hercules (*Legio XXII*) and seemed to have shown a keen interest in the half-god as well (Barry 2011, 23). Building activities in the Lower Rhineland have been dated to his reign, while the capital of the

62 Evidence in the form of brick stamps suggests that soldiers from the *Legio XXII* were stationed at *castellum Fectio* (Bogaers 1965, 106). The discovery of an altar stone near the fort points at cult practices centered on Hercules *Magusanus* in the vicinity (Van Es 1994, 53). Intensive archaeological investigation in the area has shown the existence of a densely occupied rural landscape where military veterans likely settled. Equally significant in this light are the indications for a nearby sanctuary dedicated to Haeva/Hebe, Hercules’ consort (see comments below).

63 When considering the background and motivation of those involved in the cult of Hercules *Magusanus*, it is difficult to ignore the potential role of Hispanic communities. The Iberian peninsula features importantly in Herculean myth, and Hercules sanctuaries there are numerous. Trajan was from Hispania and is known to have minted coins depicting Hercules *Gaditanus/Invictus* between 100 and 115 AD (Barry 2011, 21). The construction of the famous Tower of Brigantium (*farum Brigantium*) on the Gaelician coast was built during his reign. It purportedly marked the spot where Hercules had vanquished Geryon. Furthermore, Dio Chrysostom’s discourses on kingship were written with Trajan in mind, who he compared to Hercules (Dio Chrysostom *Orations* 1-4). In addition to the two Italic legions of Hercules, at least five legions (*Legio V Alauda*, *Legio XXI Rapax*, *Legio XX Valeria Victrix*, *Legio I Germanica*, and *Legio IIII Macedonica*) known to have served in the Rhineland had also seen active duty in Hispania during the Cantabrian wars (29-19 BC). If soldiers belonging to these legions were unfamiliar with the land where Hercules once labored, service on the Spanish frontier will undoubtedly have ensured familiarity, if not genuine interest.

Cananefates was renamed *Municipium Aelium Cananefatum*, colloquially known as *Forum Hadriani* (Voorburg). Such were the ways Rhineland communities would have felt the impact of the personal interests and activities of important political figures, which undoubtedly affected cultic discourse.

Beyond the interests and actions of Roman imperial patrons, a variety of other agents contributed to these discourses as well. The epigraphic evidence shows how *Magusanus* is mentioned in at least twenty-one inscriptions, of which fifteen have been found in the Lower Rhineland (Derks 1991, 255). The earliest inscription comes from the Batavian territory, while the vast majority of dedications occur in the German Rhineland and date to the second and third century AD.⁶⁴ Dedications were predominantly made by military men and tend to concentrate near military camps, but they also include those made by priests, traders and parents.

Such variability in the identity and background of dedicators speaks to the inherent multivalence of Hercules, but also to the multicultural and socially dynamic character of the Rhineland. The Batavian district where the three sanctuaries were located for a long time housed a large community of soldiers and civilians where an interest for Hercules, guardian of the Germanic frontier, was maintained (Roymans 1995, 56; Vossen 2003, 415).⁶⁵ We should expect a Roman-sanctioned discourse centered on a syncretic half-god to have coexisted, then, with a range of public and private alternatives. Indeed, votive dedications found throughout the region were typically made by a wide variety of individuals and groups to an equally diverse range of Roman, local and syncretic deities.

As noted earlier, the Augustan era witnessed a proliferation of sociopolitical constructs of gender difference that encouraged increased exclusion of women from the public sphere. These undoubtedly shaped imperial discourses and colonial policies on the Germanic frontier as well, and epigraphic evidence may actually reflect how this was expressed through cultic discourse. The distribution of dedications shows how the vast majority of goddesses are local, while male gods are almost always Roman in origin (Derks 1998). Furthermore, all syncretic deities are male and of regional significance, while native female deities are typically of micro-regional importance. The latter are also exclusively concerned with aspects of health and reproduction. We see then that the epigraphic habit reflects a striking contrast between female and male spheres, a colonial discourse that may, or may not, have mirrored social realities, but certainly will have concerned the Hercules cult as well.

Nothing comparable to Hercules *Musagetes* seems to have existed on the Germanic frontier. That particular symbolic narrative may never have been appropriate for communicating cultural reconstruction and political reconciliation

64 The earliest inscription dates to the first half of the first century AD and concerns a dedication by a Batavian *civitas* official. The next datable inscription comes from the Trajanic period and was dedicated by a veteran from the *Legio X* (Roymans 2004, 248).

65 Latin, Celtic and Greek names have been found inscribed on ceramics, while epigraphic evidence points at the presence of Spanish veterans of the *Legio X Gemini* (Haalebos 2000, 467). Over time, a great number of military units and appended communities would occupy the Rhineland, with veterans and civilians permanently settling there as well (Alföldy 1968; Holder 1999).

on the frontier, such as happened in Rome under Augustus.⁶⁶ There are, however, credible indications for the role of female oracles in the Rhineland, and these may have been associated with Hercules. Literary sources refer to women of divine status and with the power of foresight. They seemed to have held significant political authority and served as arbiters in local conflicts.⁶⁷ However, as in Rome, we probably should not expect women to have participated in triumphal banquets and other such ceremonies staged by Roman authorities at the three sanctuaries as these will have been restricted to men and soldiers. That women did make offerings to the half-god is shown by an altar stone dedicated to Hercules *Magusanus* and Haeva by a husband and wife requesting divine protection over their children (Roymans 2009, 233). Haeva's association with Hercules, together with the content of the dedication, suggests that she is to be equated with Juventas, Roman goddess of youth. In Rome, invocations to Juventas were made in a temple of Hercules and involved appeals for the safety of military youths (*velites*).

It is furthermore possible that Haeva was a local transcription of Hebe, the Greek equivalent of Juventas. Her presence in the area is corroborated by the name of the Roman fort *Levefanum* (Rijswijk) situated near the confluence of the Rhine and Lek (Bechert and Willems 1995, 80). *Levefanum* may be a transcription of *Hebefanum*, thereby referring to a sanctuary of Hebe in the vicinity. If true, it may be another instance of symbolic manufacturing by the colonial power, and again involving Hercules, though in this instance by way of his female consort. Because *castellum Levefanum* was built (c. 50AD) after the period of Early Roman offenses in Germania, the choice of Hebe over Hercules himself may have been an early attempt by Roman authorities to emphasize themes of imperial longevity at a time when policies were shifting towards territorial consolidation and the formation of a permanent frontier. Mythological narratives surrounding Hebe, as cupbearer of the Olympian gods, primarily centre on themes of rejuvenation and immortality.

This isn't to say that dedicators to Hercules and Hebe stationed at *Levefanum*, such as the members of a Thracian mounted unit (*cohors I Thracum equitata*), would not construct their own narratives while freely and frequently referencing well-known myths. Indeed, those associated with a homeland will have been closely nurtured by troops stationed abroad, even becoming part of regimental discourse.⁶⁸

66 Though see Swinkels (2009) for depictions of Hercules and the muses on a terra sigillata cup from Nijmegen, dated to the early first century AD.

67 The Bructerian prophetess Veleda in particular had a crucial part to play in the Batavian Revolt (Tacitus *Germania* 8; *The Histories* 4.61, 4.65, 5.22). Upon her capture, her status seems to have proven a challenge to Roman authorities, and, rather than falling victim to violent retribution for her part in the uprisings, was placed into exile south of Rome where she spent her remaining days as a temple servant (AE 1953, 25).

68 For example, for members of Thracian mounted units stationed along the Germanic frontier (Derks 2009, 254) one can think of Hercules' eighth labor, wherein he defeats the king of Thrace (Diomedes) and tames his man-eating horses. There is also a curious episode that tells of Thracian women being the only females allowed in a shrine of Hercules (Pausanias *Description of Greece* 7.5.8). Furthermore, Ares/Mars, being born in Thrace and worshipped as this community's patron deity, was Hebe's brother. It was Hebe who healed her brother's wounds on the battle field. The symbolism surrounding her husband's apotheosis to Olympus, will also have had great appeal to a military community; immortality being the promised reward for their earthly labors.

Hercules and his consort possibly occupied a prominent place in the cultic life of Thracian units (*cohors IV Thracum*) stationed at the Valkenburg fort (*praetorium Agrippinae*) as well. There, the remains of a Hercules statue were found, which was likely erected during Trajan's reign when other Hercules sanctuaries on the Germanic frontier were monumentalized (De Hingh and Vos 2006, 151).

Having emphasized the changing face of a Roman-sanctioned discourse, along with some of the alternatives maintained by a large community of individuals with mixed identities and backgrounds, something can also be said about their demise. The abandonment of the sanctuaries occurred before the Batavian identity disappeared due to the Late Roman ethnic reconfiguration of the Lower Rhineland. The end of associated discourses was likely the result of the increased frequency of cross-border raiding by Germanic groups during the third century AD, culminating in the permanent settlement of the Franks. The association of Hercules with frontier defense is suggested by the numismatic evidence from the reign of Postumus who founded the short-lived Gallic Empire (260-274 AD) in direct response to Germanic invasions (Drinkwater 1987). Postumus, reportedly of humble Batavian descent, is known to have issued coins depicting Hercules *Magusanus/Deusonius*. This symbolic reference to the sacred guardian of the Lower Rhineland frontier is easily understood in this third century context. However, due to the frequent collapse of frontier defenses, it became impossible for Hercules to retain this status. The permanent inability of Rome to go on the offensive, in turn, precluded a revisiting of Herculean themes of victorious conquest.

The fall of the Roman Empire led to the formation of the Frankish kingdoms south of the old frontier, with the Early Medieval period marked by the internal struggles of the Merovingian dynasty and conflicts with the Frisians for control of the Lower Rhineland. The rise of Christianity within Frankish society, and the political purposes to which it was put, ensured the permanent removal of Hercules from the dominant discourse. Ritual failure in this context, then, may be understood as involving the abandonment of particular narratives and rituals by dominant political powers. However, here as well, the reality of cultic heterogeneity can be shown by the way Hercules remained relevant in the lives of people in the region. Evidence for this comes from the Frisian territory with dates covering the Late Roman and Early Medieval periods (Therkorn 2004; Therkorn *et al.* 2009).⁶⁹ It suggests the survival of a cultic discourse confronted by Christian missionaries and eventually prohibited (or creatively negotiated) by church authorities as pagan folk practice and superstition. With the completion of Frisian conversion unrealised until the twelfth or even thirteenth century, the possibility that Werenfried's church at Elst represents a Christian colonization of an ancient site of lingering symbolic potency may not be altogether farfetched.

69 Research by Therkorn (2004, 88) suggests that star constellations (symbolizing Hercules and other deities) were marked out in settlement space. Further evidence comes in the form of Hercules amulets that were predominantly worn by women and children (Therkorn 2009, 107). Thematically, Hercules remained associated with fortune, fertility, and protection.

Conclusion

While archaeologists are ideally placed to study the material traces of ritual behaviour, it has been the character and availability of archaeological evidence that has shaped the methodological preferences of archaeologists in distinct ways. Since the 1980s, post-processual approaches have increasingly focused on such things as symbolic content, social function, and subjective experience (Insoll 2004; Barrowclough and Malone 2007; Fogelin 2007). What these approaches have in common is the way they tend to distinguish analytically between content (myths and symbols), form (practices, objects, and structures), and context (spatio-temporal and social). Those studying symbolic systems tend to focus on the examination of literary, representational and comparative sources, while those interested in practice-oriented, functionalist and phenomenological approaches restrict their gaze to the material traces of ritual behaviours and spaces. Furthermore, ritual practices also often demonstrate stronger historical endurance than the more transient symbolic narratives they are associated with. We can see this, for example, in the wide distribution of like ritual forms across cultural boundaries in prehistoric Europe, as much as in the ways indigenous rituals continued when new symbolic narratives arrived under Roman colonial rule. Because of this, separating ritual practices from symbolic systems, as archaeologists are prone to do, clearly has analytical merit.

For the purposes of this discussion on cultic heterogeneity, I have approached ritual practices and symbolic narratives (*i.e.* cultic discourse) as historically situated and socially reproduced constructs that are embedded in broader cultural moralities and worldviews. In recognizing the complexity of past entanglements, and the heterogeneity of cultic discourse, my aim was to produce a thick description of those surrounding a single cult. This I have attempted to do by considering the narratives, rituals and contexts engaged by various groups and individuals, along with their motives and perspectives, and by using multiple lines of evidence – literary, representational, archaeological and historical.

Research on Hercules *Magusanus* has so far largely focused on the symbolic construction of community, whereby the formative period of the Batavian identity, and the role of *Magusanus* for the self-definition of this community vis-à-vis Rome, has dominated discussions. A structuralist focus on environment and modes-of-existence have also made ideological endurance a central aspect, while Marxist views on the instrumental manipulation of ideology has placed elites at the center of interpretive arguments. Though offering a compelling framework for thinking about local cultic experience, this combination of post-colonial and Marxist-structuralist perspectives risks reducing past complexities, because it neglects colonial and subordinate interests. Before we can evaluate the meaning of a sacred inscription on a ceramic cup, bronze ring or altar stone, or can begin to understand the social significance of rituals in a variety of spatio-temporal contexts, it serves to consider a broad range of situated narratives, practices, and actors. The heterogeneous nature of cultic discourse, such as described here for a syncretic deity under colonial conditions, is worth exploring in other contexts as well, when evidence allows for this.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Vasiliki Koutrafoura and Jeff Sanders for organizing a stimulating TAG session on the archaeology of ritual failure, and for laboring to see the publication of this volume realized. I am also grateful for the advice and insights offered by friends and colleagues at the University of Amsterdam and the University of Chicago. Though these have certainly helped shape my arguments, any factual errors or logical fallacies remain my own.

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